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ABSTRACT

In an effort to sensitize college students of Spanish for the professions to the values and social reality of the Hispanic world, one teacher used a combination of demographic information and Hispanic American literature. Information on the geographic distribution and characteristics of Hispanic groups in the United States was provided as a context for understanding the Hispanic experience, and writings by Hispanics who had seen a renaissance since the 1960s' civil rights struggle in the United States were used to supplement the demographic data. The literature contains the experiences, aspirations, and perspectives of immigrants and exiles to the United States, and poetry in particular was found to be a powerful sensitizing tool. Themes of the works include the migrant workers' experience, hopes placed in education for the children, the community, Hispanic heroes, social injustice, and the reasons for leaving the native countries. The emotional response and empathy of the students is seen as the most important tool for working effectively with Hispanic clients and patients. (MSE)

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DEVELOPING CULTURAL SENSITIVITY IN SPANISH FOR SPECIAL PURPOSES

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The Hispanics are the fastest growing minority in the United States today, and it is estimated that by the year 2,000 they will be the largest in the country. Yet little is known about the Hispanic experience in the United States, and little has been done to explore the extent to which Latino cultural expressions reflect underlying conditions in the Latino community and in their history of migration and exile. A cross-cultural humanistic perspective would provide an opportunity to relate the increasingly diverse cultural expressions of the Latinos to the difficult realities of the growing Latino population.

Students of Spanish for Special Purposes do not necessarily learn to appreciate viewpoints of the Latino culture. Many of the books and materials in the field have avoided this topic altogether or have limited themselves to a very cursory discussion. If our students are to learn to interact effectively and with empathy it is our responsibility to sensitize them to values and perspectives of the people with which they will be working. An exploration of U.S. Latino literature integrated thematically with the linguistic component of a Special Purposes course would not only expose the student to the unique vantage point from which Latino writers view the social concerns and history of their people but also make them aware of the complex issues raised by increasingly divergent strains of language, sensibility, identity, and style which have arisen within Chicano/Mexican-American, Puerto Rican and other U.S. Latino literature flowing from the experience of migration.

This need to communicate the values and social reality of the Hispanic world became very apparent to me when I started to teach the Conversation for Professions course some years ago at the College of New Rochelle. New Rochelle is a private liberal arts college situated near Long Island Sound in Westchester County, New York. Most of the students come from the small towns and suburbs of the tri-state area of New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut. Few of these students have had firsthand experience with third world people or countries, or even countries in which they must speak a language different from their own. I suppose that for many I am the first Spanish native speaker with whom they have come in contact. Thus, as a language professional and an Hispanic, I felt doubly responsible to impress upon the students my belief that knowing the language was important, but that more was needed if they wanted to get along with, and work with other peoples.

I began this sensitizing process by first providing the students with as accurate information as is available on the geographical distribution and population of the various Hispanic groups, and on characteristics such as age, sex, education, employment, and income. Such information was necessary to provide a context for the students' understanding of the Hispanic experience. It should be stressed, however, that useful as the above information is, by itself, it adds nothing to the students' familiarity with the daily aspects of life, the ideas, or the values of the Hispanics.

To fill in these gaps I decided to turn to the rich source which was readily available, the writings of Hispanics in the U.S. which had seen a renaissance since the socio-political Civil Rights struggle of the mid-1960's. Hispanic letters in this country had also been enriched by the many writers from the Southern Cone, and Central America who were living in exile here now. In these writings were the experiences, aspirations, and points of view of

people very different from themselves to help the students gain that insider's perspective on the Hispanic reality. I found that poetry, in particular, with its capacity to express nuances, feelings, and levels of meaning was a powerful sensitizing tool. The poems I selected were those that conveyed social information about the Hispanics and would, thus, shed light on important aspects of their history and culture.

For the study of the Chicano experience I chose various poems of Tino Villanueva, one of the leading Chicano contemporary poets. Villanueva, born in San Marcos, Texas to migrant worker parents writes of the hardship and isolation of the life of the Chicano.

In his two volumes of poetry, Hay otra voz Poems (Colección Mensaje: 1972) and Shaking off the Dark (Arte Público Press: 1984) Villanueva writes in both English and Spanish, as well as a mixture of both languages. It is a style, as Villanueva has called it, which is bisensible (Tino Villanueva, ed. Chicanos: Antología histórica y literaria, Fondo de Cultura Económica: 1980, 54), the result of the bicultural experience of being raised in two cultures, the Mexican and the Anglo-american. Moving within these two cultures, the Chicano has a double sensibility -- a "bisensibility" which leads the individual to perceive aspects of reality which have not been explored very much, such as the silence of the oppressed. For Villanueva this silence is death because it eradicates history and leads a people to oblivion. Villanueva's poetry of the Chicano experience breaks through this silence both as an act of affirmation of the self, and as an expression of the collective voice of his people. Villanueva's poetry reminds us of the struggle of the Chicano and their right to exist.

In his poems on the migrant experience, Villanueva gives voice to the silent unalterable life of the farm worker. In this life, heat, sweat, and time lock the migrant into a cycle of alienation: "Third generation timetable./ Sweat day-long dripping into open space." ("Day-long Day," "Hay otra voz Poems," 38)

The future too is locked into this cycle, the child migrant "cries out for milk .../shrivels in November's fever." "I too have walked my barrio streets," Shaking off the Dark, 57).

The migrants place their hopes in the education of their children. "Estudia para que no seas burro como nosotros." ("Day-long Day," Hay otra voz Poems, 39). "But here too they are rejected ... indifferent teachers/ who've snickered at my native surname" ("I too have walked my barrio streets" Shaking off the Dark, 55). "Maestros que ni ven, ni oyen, que hay otra voz que quiere hablar." ("Que hay otra voz," Otra voz Poems, 37). Here in the classroom, the child was powerless and forced to listen to the prejudiced views of the teacher: "And beware of the Mexicans .../ They are a great/ deal more treacherous than Indians." (Tino Villanueva "Clase de historia," in Pérez-Erdélyi and Kupferschmid, Casos en la comunidad, Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1985, 120-122).

Other poems of Villanueva recall the barrio, his grandparents, childhood games, tortillas, Chicano dropouts, César Chávez and other Chicano heroes. Villanueva's poetry is an invaluable source for sensitizing students to the pain and social injustice of the Chicano situation.

This theme of social injustice is of great importance also in understanding the reasons for migration of other Hispanic groups, such as the Cubans, Central Americans, Argentines, and Chileans. Writers from these groups are generally concerned with expressing the unique perspective of the exile, and in evoking the anguish caused by the repression and violence in their countries. These themes are very evident in the poetry of Marjorie Agosín, one of the leading Chilean poets living in the United States today.

Agosín's poetry: Chile: gemidos y cantares (Editorial El Observador, Santiago, 1977), Conchalí (Senda Nueva de Ediciones, 1980), Brujas y algo más/Witches and Other Things (Latin American Literary Review, 1984) is an invitation to

live consciously, and is thus, an indictment of repression, be it sexual or political. As a political woman, Agosín manifests her solidarity with women oppressed by their sex, as well as by their economic and political marginality. Agosín visualizes the life of the undocumented poor; of the woman relegated to her conventionally silent role; of the painful existence of the women who have lost their families because of the political situation of Chile.

Far from her beloved Chile, from her muse, she recalls: "Mi país es color de humo/y planchas de carbón." ("Lejos," Brujas y algo más, 84). She tells of the experience of the exiled "...que sólo quiere ver el paisaje/de su tierra." ("Balada del desterrado," Brujas, 82). But this Chile does not belong to the Chileans anymore. Chile today is where people are tortured and disappear: "Los desaparecidos/¿dónde están?/¿Dónde está el Miguel con el pan en los bolsillos?/ ¿Dónde está la señora Rosa?" ("Los desaparecidos", Brujas, 80). It is the land where letters are returned because the addressee has vanished: "No existe tal nombre/DESAPARECIDO:" ("Mi nación y los sistemas de correo," Brujas, 70). And in neighboring Argentina, the mothers of the disappeared perform their dance of death: "Las locas de la Plaza de Mayo/se acercan/míralas como vuelan las brujas de la verdad." (Marjorie Agosín, "A las locas de la Plaza de Mayo," in Pérez-Erdélyi and Kupferschmid, Casos en la comunidad, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1985, 228-229).

Without propaganda or sentimentality Villanueva and Agosín express the difficult history of their people. Villanueva breaks the silence to which the Chicano has been relegated, and affirms their right to speak: "Speak up, Chicano, and cleanse the dark rage from the soul!" Agosín penetrates the silence of repression vowing "Yo juro apoderarme de la palabra." Through the testimony of the word Villanueva and Agosín are giving form to the history of the silenced.

My concern in this paper has been to expose to you a small range of examples by Hispanic poets written in the context of the broad struggle for social justice in the Hispanic world, which I have found very meaningful in sensitizing students in Spanish for Special Purposes to a better understanding of the Hispanic reality. Students are moved by these writers' efforts to break the silence of years, to reclaim their past. And it is precisely this emotional response, this empathy, which will aid our students the most in working effectively with Hispanic clients and patients.

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